FOREIGN WOMEN ON THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN SEA

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

Women on the Ancient Mediterranean Sea

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Throughout history, the roles of men and women have been sharply divided due to, in part, each gender's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the customs and beliefs of the various cultures in which they resided. Although men and women did not traditionally share the same occupations in classical antiquity, I seek to prove that this trend does not hold true by examining two specific cases in which women held a position of power at sea; Artemisia and Cleopatra. This thesis will provide valuable insight on the roles undertaken by these women on and around the Mediterranean Sea in classical antiquity by examining the works of contemporary authors. I will address how the specific actions of these women directly affected the outcome of history, how their actions were received by their peers, and how their actions were perceived by history. By examining what actions were taken and what perceptions were recorded in history, a better understanding of the roles of women in classical antiquity can be achieved.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family, for their unending love and support, and to my dear, sweet, and ever-loving friends, who had to deal with me whilst writing.

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NOMENCLATURE

Emporos / Emporoi – (Greek) Commonly translated as "traders," these men and women relied upon trading for their livelihoods. They traveled across the sea, using someone else's ship, for a price, and were always on the job. They did not produce goods, but instead would buy from one retailer and then sell it to another.[1]

Hoplite / Hoplites – (Greek) Was a Greek foot soldier who could afford to own and wear a full set of armor, and paid for an attendant or owned a slave that accompanied the hoplite on the campaign.

Naukleros / Naukleroi – (Greek) Commonly translated as "shipowners," these men and women did typically own the ships the *emporoi* would use, and sometimes owned the seafaring merchantmen themselves.[2]

Paterfamilias – (Latin) Translates to "head of household."

Polis / Poleis – (Greek) Translates roughly to city-state, and is the term used to describe the individual kingdoms and democratic boundaries of the many different cities within greater Greece.

Princeps – (Latin) translates literally as "first man among equals," but is in fact the official title given to Augustus, and is the title that was thereafter applied to all his successors.

Satrap – (English) Is the title given by historians to governors of Persia's provincial kingdoms.

Sui Iuris – (Latin) Translates loosely to "self-governing", and is used to describe a Roman citizen who is under their own jurisdiction, as opposed to under the jurisdiction of a *paterfamilias*.

[1] Reed, C.M. 2003. *Maritime Traders in the Ancient Greek World.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[2] Ibid.

Trireme / Triremes – (Latin) From the Greek work “trieres”, an ancient warship with three banks of rowers on each side.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WOMEN

In classical antiquity, from the 8th century BC to the 5th century AD, women were viewed primarily as a way of continuing family names and ensuring alliances between patriarchs. When women in classical antiquity married, they passed from the care and guardianship of their fathers to their husbands, never experiencing true independence. Women were believed at the time to be weaker and softer than men in both mind and body. It is this common trend throughout the cultures surrounding the Mediterranean in classical antiquity that I will explore, utilizing the evidence of the daily lives of specific women whose actions were outside of the preconceived ideas of what a woman in classical Greece or in the late Roman Republic was supposed to do in life. This becomes extremely obvious in the cases of two foreign women who take naval command on the Mediterranean. Their treatment by contemporary authors is a mix of disgust, mistrust, and begrudged admiration. I hypothesize that this treatment is because of the common belief in classical antiquity that the sea was a place of danger. Therefore the reality of a foreign woman in a position of authority while also in such an unpredictable environment posed a unique response from the writers in classical antiquity. Before we can examine the influence of these foreign women, we must first establish what the traditional roles were for women in the Greco-Roman culture.

A traditional woman's life

> "*He who teaches his wife how to read and write does no good. He's giving additional poison to a horrible snake."* – Menander, a fragment from a lost play.[3]

The life of a woman in classical antiquity was dictated greatly by her father, who decided from the moment she was born everything that would happen to her in life. A father could decide to abandon a newborn baby rather than keep and raise it at home. His choice would not be questioned by the community. Although the mother was in charge of schooling young children in the house, it was the father who decided which children would continue to receive education and what tutors would be consulted or brought into the household. It is important to remember that education in this era was far less structured than education is today, and was extremely dependent on the current political atmosphere of each individual social class at the time. Early in classical antiquity, education could only be afforded by the very wealth who would hire tutors that would instruct the children from within the home. Boys were taught history, how to read and write, the art of rhetoric, and had to learn not only the great epics of Homer, but also more contemporary lyric and dramatic poetry.[4] Girls were given a less formal education, and instead were taught from a young age the arts of womanhood; that of spinning, weaving, and how to manage the slaves and household. Girls were given a basic education in reading and writing, though only later in classical antiquity and only those who came from families wealthy enough to afford the expense of the education. The matron of the household was expected to teach the girls under her care how to properly manage not only the slaves attending her, but how to maintain the slaves of the entire house. This including everything from keeping the kitchens well stocked to ensure that wool was being combed and carded and turned into garments by the

[3] Garland, R. 2008. *Ancient Greece*, pg. 166.
[4] Garland, R. 2008. *Ancient Greece*, pg. 164-167.

female slaves. Women were expected to keep everyone busy and productive within the household, as this fulfilled the idea of the perfect wife, one who was never outside chatting away the day or visiting friends in the city but instead remaining quietly productive at home.[5]

Marriage

Once a girl in classical antiquity reached puberty, her family could expect to begin receiving suitors on her behalf. Girls were typically married between the ages of 12 and 16, though arrangements for marriage could be made much earlier. The parents of the girl would seek out a marriage that would benefit her, ideally. Suitors would make their cases to the girl's parents either through bride-gifts or by their own reputation in society as a wealthy, kind, or generous man. Husbands were generally much older than their wives, and the later in classical antiquity the more common divorce became, along with second and third marriages.[6] After the wedding ceremony, and depending on the type of wedding agreed upon between the father of the bride and the bridegroom or the bridegroom's family, girls in classical antiquity left their family house and came under the care and command of their new husband and his family. The girls did not go alone, however, into this new home. Accompanying any bride of means in the ancient world was a dowry, which served a similar function to today's gift registries. She would bring a few fine garments from her home, along with money, slaves, and jewelry, depending on how much wealth her family had. Although while the two were married her husband would have control over the dowry, he would also have to repay it in full if the two got divorced.

[5] D'Ambra, E. 2007. *Roman Women,* pg. 59-61.
[6] Garland, R. 2008. *Ancient Greece*, pg. 70-73.

Dowries and Bride-Gifts

In classical antiquity, the gender ratios of the city-states fluctuated from various wars, diseases, and the preference for male heirs over female ones. Because of this fluctuation, women in classical antiquity sometimes were a rare and valued commodity, whilst other times they were viewed as a burden on the family and an unnecessary expense. Bride-gifts were offered by the suitor to the would-be bride's family when there was a scarcity of women and young girls in the community, whereas during period of more balanced ratios or in communities where the women outnumbered the men, dowries that would accompany the new family to their household were provided by the bride's family. Dowries were both an incentive to prospective suitors and a guarantee that a daughter was going into a new household with some means of her own.

Children

Bearing children was the highest duty of a wife to her husband in classical antiquity. Having children was not only highly anticipated but was even encouraged by the government during the Roman Empire. The emperor Augustus passed a piece of legislation during his reign that gave tax breaks to women who had given birth to more than three children, and even made them *sui iuris*.[7] Childbirth was one of the greatest killers of women in antiquity. This along with high infant and childhood mortality rates led to a younger population than we have today. But this high mortality rate merely encouraged those in antiquity to have many children, so as to ensure that at least one child survived to adulthood and would carry on the family's lineage. Sons were always needed in classical antiquity, as they could inherit their father's land and holdings, as well as his social influence. Daughters were, as was common in antiquity, less desirable.

[7] See Nomenclature.

Woman's work

Women in classical antiquity were expected to maintain the homestead while their male counterparts engaged in work outside the home, such as military campaigns and political affairs. The matron of the household oversaw all of the home's slaves, the upkeep and cleaning of the household, timely meal preparations, and daily rituals to appease the family gods and guardians, as well as teaching and entertaining any children in the home. It was her duty to keep everything running smoothly, even managing the family's finances if needed.[8]

Household work

Women were responsible for maintaining the household, keeping the slaves busy with the day's work, seeing to the education of the children, preparing the house to receive guests, and in part helping keep track of the household's finances. The idealized image of a woman in classical antiquity was one busy with work inside the home, never concerned with outside distractions. The pinnacle of that idea was wool-work, or the long and time-consuming process of turning raw sheep's wool into garments or other textile goods. A matron of the house would direct her slaves as they carefully brushed all the twigs and bugs out of the wool, and then spun it into useable thread. That thread would then be woven on a loom into a wide rectangle of cloth that could be used by the family, or sold for a profit.

Religious affairs

Women were active in many of the religious ceremonies throughout the year. Some rituals were shared with the entire community, while others were exclusive to women. Those exclusive to

[8] D'Ambra, E. 2007. *Roman Women*, pg. 94-102.

women included the festivals of the great mother goddess of the Romans, Bona Dea, as well as the Eleusinian cult shared by Romans and Greeks that favored Demeter and Persephone. There were also the Vestal Virgins of Rome, whose priestesses were chosen from Roman families at a young age and who remained the chaste caretakers of the sacred hearth of Vesta for 30 years. Afterwards they could decide to leave their priesthood and marry or stay on for the rest of their lives. [9]

[9] D'Ambra, E. 2007. *Roman Women*, pg. 168-170.

CHAPTER II

ARTEMISIA OF CARIA

> "I see no need to mention any of the other captains except Artemisia. I find it a great marvel that a woman went on the expedition against Hellas: after her husband died, she took over his tyranny, though she had a young son, and followed the army from youthful spirits and manliness, under no compulsion. Artemisia was her name, and she was the daughter of Lygdamis; on her fathers' side she was of Halicarnassian lineage, and on her mothers' Cretan. She was the leader of the men of Halicarnassus and Cos and Nisyrus and Kalydnos, and provided five ships. Her ships were reputed to be the best in the whole fleet after the ships of Sidon, and she gave the king the best advice of all his allies. The cities that I said she was the leader of are all of Dorian stock, as I can show, since the Halicarnassians are from Troezen, and the rest are from Epidaurus." – Herodotus, "The Histories," Bk 7.99.

From infancy to immortality

This high praise was written by the Father of History himself about one of his fellow countrymen, a woman who instead of shying away from the responsibilities of the throne during a war met those demands with a confidence and zeal as-yet unseen displayed in a woman in the ancient world. Artemisia's accomplishments so outshined those of the husband whose throne she ascended to after his death that his name is lost to time, while the names of her own father and son are preserved. Artemisia was born to Lygdamis I of Halicarnassus and a mother from the island of Crete.[10] Her father was ruler of Halicarnassus, called the satrap[11], and was an ally of the great Persian Empire. Sometime after her marriage, Artemisia gave birth to a son, called Pisindelis, who would succeed her as ruler over Halicarnassus, Kos, Nisyros, and Kalyndos.

[10] Herodotus, *The Histories.* Bk 7.99, Translated by A.D. Godley.
[11] See *Nomenclature.*

While her son was still but a youth her husband died, leaving her alone as ruler to answer King Xerxes' call to arms for the second Persian assault on Greece in 480 BC. [12]

The Second Greco-Persian War

After the Persian King Darius I suffered defeat at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC, the Persian forces withdrew from Greece, ending the first Persian assault on Greece in favor of regrouping and renewing his attack later. King Darius I however would not live to see the second attack, dying in 486 BC and leaving his empire in the hands of his son Xerxes. The new king began the second Persian assault of Greece in 480 BC, after drafting troops from around the empire to join the assault force. Xerxes led his troops south from Macedon towards Thessaly and greater Greece, though his forces were delayed for a time on land at Thermopylae and at sea in the Straits of Artemisium.

The Battles of Thermopylae and Artemisium

The Persian forces of 480 BC did not march uncontested straight down to the gates of Athens, but were instead met with unified opposition from the Greek states who sought to prevent their conquest. These unified Greek forces were led by the cities of Athens and Sparta, but consisted of 70 different *poleis* throughout Greece.[13] The troops at Thermopylae were under the command of the Spartan King Leonidas, who marched with about 7,000 men to hold the mountain pass. Although the Greek troops faced an army 15 to 20 times its size, the hoplite phalanx was perfectly suited to the terrain, and as such the Greeks were able to hold the pass for several

[12] Herodotus, *The Histories.* Bk 7.99, Translated by A.D. Godley.
[13] See Nomenclature; Herodotus, *The Histories.* Bk 8.40-75., Translated by A.D. Godley

days.[14] Eventually another way through the mountains was obtained by the Persians, and on the third day the remaining Greek forces were wiped out from both sides. Simultaneously, the Greek fleet awaited the arrival of the Persian ships in the Straits of Artemisium, where the allied Greeks hoped to stop the onslaught of ships. Each side suffered about equal losses after the day's battle but the much smaller Greek fleet was forced to withdraw as it could not sustain the position without reinforcements, and with the defeat at Thermopylae leaving that side exposed to enemy forces it was better to retreat to the stronger position in the port of Salamis, and island off the coast of Attica. [15]

The Battle of Salamis

With the Persian victories at Thermopylae and Artemisium, King Xerxes now had control over most of Greece. The rest of the allied Greeks retreated to the Peloponnese, and began erecting a wall across the Isthmus of Corinth. Those who remained in Athens met the oncoming Persian forces and were killed either by the Persians or by the fire that burned down Athens. [16] It is around this time that King Xerxes sent messengers to his commanders, including Artemisia, asking if he should do battle against the Greek navy. Out of all of the Persian commanders, Artemisia was the only one to advise the king against another naval battle with the Greeks. According to Herodotus, she stated, "Spare your ships and do not fight a battle at sea. For their men are as superior to yours at sea as men are to women. Why need you run the risk of naval actions at all? Do you not hold Athens, the particular objective of your campaign, and do you not control the rest of Greece? No one stands in your way. Those who resisted you have ended as

[14] Garland, R. 2008. *Ancient Greece*, pg. 17-18.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

they deserve."[17] King Xerxes did not heed her advice, however, and readied his ships for battle. The allied Greek navy awaited the Persians in a narrow strait between the island of Salamis and mainland Greece, where the more numerous and longer ships of the Persians would have far less maneuverability. King Xerxes positioned himself atop the cliffs looking down over the watery battlefield, giving him the unique perspective of viewing all that happened during the battle, an account that has since been lost to time. Artemisia did survive the battle, and Herodotus reports one of the actions she took during the battle. While the Persian fleet was tangled amongst itself, Artemisia's ship was being pursued by an Athenian vessel. In an effort to escape she rammed a fellow Persian ship, successfully sinking it and all the crew. The Athenian ship chasing her pulled off, assuming that anyone who attacked a Persian ship with such vigor must be an ally. King Xerxes, watching from above believed the ship she sank to be a Greek vessel, praised her valor and is quoted as saying, "My men have behaved like women, my women like men!"[18] Thus Artemisia was held in even higher esteem by her king, and survived the battle with no one alive able to decry her traitorous act of friendly fire.

[17] Herodotus, *The Histories.* Bk 8, Translated by A. D. Godley
[18] Ibid.

CHAPTER III

CLEOPATRA VII OF EGYPT

> For her actual beauty, it is said, was not in itself so remarkable that none could be compared with her, or that no one could see her without being struck by it, but the contact of her presence, if you lived with her, was irresistible; the attraction of her person, joining with the charm of her conversation, and the character that attended all she said or did, was something bewitching. It was a pleasure merely to hear the sound of her voice, with which, like an instrument of many strings, she could pass from one language to another; so that there were few of the barbarian nations that she answered by an interpreter; to most of them she spoke herself, as to the Ethiopians, Troglodytes, Hebrews, Arabians, Syrians, Medes, Parthians, and many others, whose language she had learnt; which was all the more surprising because most of the kings, her predecessors, scarcely gave themselves the trouble to acquire the Egyptian tongue, and several of them quite abandoned the Macedonian. – Plutarch, "The Life of Antony."

The Ptolemaic Dynasty

Cleopatra was the last in a line of nearly 300 yearlong dynasty established by Alexander the Great and the man who would give his name to the dynasty as well as all surviving male heirs, Ptolemy I. Ptolemy was one of Alexander's top generals, and was assigned the satrapy of Egypt upon Alexander's death in 323 BC. Ptolemy declared himself king of Egypt in 305 BC, and later on adopted the epithet "Soter," which means savior. The Ptolemaic Dynasty married within itself, with brothers and sisters, uncles and nieces often operating as co-rulers as well as husband and wife, creating a complex family tree made all the more confusing by the fact that all the men were named Ptolemy and the women were named either Arsinoe, Berenice, or Cleopatra.[19] The Ptolemies were of Macedonian decent, and it wasn't until Cleopatra VII that the ruler of Egypt actually knew and could speak the same language as her subjects.

[19] See Appendix for Ptolemaic Family Tree

Sibling rivalries

Cleopatra first came to the throne under the power of her father, Ptolemy XII Auletes, ruling alongside him from 55 BC until his death in 51 BC. In accordance to her father's will, Cleopatra and her younger brother Ptolemy XIII married on another and became co-rulers of Egypt. At that time, Ptolemy was merely 10 years old to Cleopatra's 18, and soon it became clear that Cleopatra intended to be the true power on the throne. Her face appeared on all newly minted coins, instead of her brothers, and his name was removed from official documents. Ptolemy did not intend to be so easily forced from his throne, however. In 48 BC, under the influence of his chief eunuch Potheinus, Ptolemy launched an attack on Cleopatra aimed at removing her from the throne, forcing her to flee to Syria. There Cleopatra was able to gather her own forces and took control of her own army. While Ptolemy and Cleopatra were away from the royal court in Alexandria, their younger sister Arsinoe VI declared herself sole ruler of Egypt, creating even more confusion. It was amid this chaos that Rome's great civil war collided with the turbulent Egyptian court after the Battle of Pharsalos in Greece. The forces of Julius Caesar, having soundly defeated those of Pompeius, now pursued the fleeing commander as he made his way to Egypt. Ptolemy agreed to offer shelter to Pompeius, but only so that he could deliver the defeated general's head to the victorious Caesar in an effort to ingratiate himself with the most powerful man in Rome. This was a serious miscalculation on the part of Ptolemy and Potheinus, for Caesar was displeased at having the head of his former ally and son-in-law presented to him, and demanded the rest of the body so Pompeius could have a proper Roman funeral. Caesar was accompanied by his troops into Egypt, and seized control of the tumultuous state in order to decide for himself who should rule Egypt. Cleopatra had much greater success in gaining Caesar as an ally, reportedly smuggling herself rolled up in a rug and carried in by servants into the

royal palace, where Caesar was staying as a guest of Ptolemy. She quickly won Caesar's favor, and he in turn supported her bid for the Egyptian throne. Only 9 months after their first meeting, Cleopatra gave birth to her first child, a son she called Ptolemy Caesar, with the nickname Caesarion to help distinguish him from his uncle and his father. Caesar refused to formally acknowledge the child as his heir, however, preferring to name his grand-nephew Octavian as his heir. After realizing that Cleopatra had won the favor of the man who had the most troops in Alexandria at the time, Ptolemy allied himself with his other sister Arsinoe. Shortly afterward this pact was made, Arsinoe was traded to Caesar's forces in exchange for the release of her brother. She was shipped back to Rome and placed in the Sanctuary of Artemis for safe-keeping. Meanwhile in Alexandria, her brother clashed with Caesar's troops within the city limits of Alexandria and caused damaged to many of the civic buildings, including the famous Library of Alexandria. While fleeing the battle, Ptolemy fell overboard his ship and drowned in the Nile, leaving Cleopatra uncontested in her bid for the throne of Egypt. She later named her youngest brother, Ptolemy XIV, co-regent, although this seems to have been in name only.

The Roman Civil War

In the year 46 BC Cleopatra, Caesarion, and Ptolemy XIV came to Rome and resided in one of Caesar's many country houses. Cleopatra and Caesar continued their affair while in Italy to the disdain of the Roman people, as Caesar was currently married to a prominent noblewoman named Calpurnia Piso. Caesar even erected a golden statute of Cleopatra in the guise of the Egyptian goddess Isis, and placed it within his ancestral temple of Venus Genetrix.[20] On March 15th of 44 BC, Caesar was assassinated within the Senate by conspirators, leaving Cleopatra and

[20] Appian, *The Civil Wars* Bk 2.102.

her court stranded within Italy until members of the Caesarian faction were able to negotiate a peace with the conspirators. Shortly after Caesar's assassination, Ptolemy XIV died under suspicious circumstances and was widely believed to have been poisoned by his sister.[21] This allowed Cleopatra to place her son Caesarion at her side as co-regent, and groom him for his role as heir not only to her own throne but potentially to his father's estate as well. The later dream was proven false early on, when Caesar's chosen heir and grand-nephew Octavian fully embraced his role, going so far as to discourage use of his name Octavian and went by Caesar instead. Cleopatra and Caesarion returned to Egypt to take stock of the new players in the Roman Civil War and determine who they should back in the struggle for power over Rome. Cleopatra favored the Caesarian faction at first due to her earlier association with its namesake, but mishap after mishap kept her out of the main fighting for a few years. First the leader of the Caesarion party in the eastern Mediterranean was defeated in battle and committed suicide, then when Cleopatra tried to sail with her fleet to meet the rest of the party leaders she was caught in a storm forcing her to retreat back to Egypt with her damaged ships and an illness.[22]

Cleopatra and Antony

One of the leaders of the Caesarian faction was Marcus Antonius, and in 41 BC he sent an envoy to Alexandria to ascertain her loyalties and bring her to meet him in Tarsus. Cleopatra arrived in the harbor of Tarsus with her most extravagant personal ship that had been decorated extensively for the occasion. Antony was so taken in by her he remained in Alexandria for the next few months. Late in the year 41 BC, Cleopatra had Antony order the execution of her last living sibling, Arsinoe, which was carried out on the steps of the sanctuary where she had been

[21] Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews.* Bk 15.89. Translated by W. Whiston.
[22] Appian, *The Civil Wars* Bk 4:63-82. Translated by H. White.

residing.[23] Antony left for Rome early in the year 40 BC, and in December of that same year Cleopatra gave birth to twins, a boy named Alexander Helios and a girl called Cleopatra Selene II. Although Antony would not return to Alexandria for another four years, when he finally did return he fully embraced the Egyptian culture and customs, and he and Cleopatra were married in the year 37 BC. This caused quite a stir back in Rome, as Antony had been recently married to the sister of Octavian, and the marriage permanently damaged the relationship between the two strongest men in Rome. In 36 BC Cleopatra gave birth to her fourth and final child, a son called Ptolemy Philadelphus. In the following years, Antony doted on his new family, crowning Cleopatra as "Queen of Kings" and naming their children as rulers over various islands in the Mediterranean Sea. Within Egypt, Cleopatra went by the epithet "New Isis," and believed herself the reincarnation of the goddess, or at least projected that idea to her subjects. Antony also publically acknowledged Caesarion as a son of Caesar and the true heir to his titles and estates.

Cleopatra and Antony's relationship with Rome continually deteriorated when news broke of each new extravagant title or party. Finally in 33 BC Octavian allowed the tripartite agreement between himself, Antony, and a third Roman nobleman named Lepidus, to expire without renewal. Over the following two years in Rome, Octavian succeeded in turning the Romans against Antony, accusing him of abandoning his traditional Roman ways, his wife, and legitimate children to play with the hedonistic queen and her extravagant Egyptian ways. In the spring of 32 BC Antony formally divorced his wife Octavia, and shortly afterwards Rome declared war on Egypt. The fighting did not begin until the following year, though at first there were just a few

[23] Appian, *The Civil Wars*, Bk 5:8-12. Translated by H. White.

minor skirmishes. The true conflict took place on September 2nd, 31 BC, off the coast of Actium in Greece. There Cleopatra, in command of her fleet of Egyptian warships and Antony, in command of his Roman triremes, met Octavian's fleet. Cleopatra was reported to have fled the battle shortly after it began and Antony followed, abandoning his troops on land and those ships that couldn't flee in time. The two escaped back to Alexandria, where they spent nearly a year attempting to recuperate from their losses, and to rework their tenuous political positions within Rome and Egypt. They would ultimately fail, however, and on August 1st, 30 BC Octavian invaded Alexandria and occupied the city, and made the once independent kingdom into a Roman province. That same day, Antony committed suicide. Cleopatra would follow him nine days later, reportedly poisoning herself with a venomous snake bite or an ointment.[24]

[24] Strabo, *Geographies*, Bk 17.1.10.

CHAPTER IV

A CHANGING PERCEPTION OF WOMEN

Cleopatra and Artemisia rebuked the expectations of the proper role for a woman of their time periods. Artemisia was singled out of all the commanders for Persia solely because the Greeks could not tolerate a woman who dared to openly challenge them. Herodotus writes, "For the Athenian captains had received special orders touching the queen; and moreover a reward of ten thousand drachmas had been proclaimed for anyone who should make her prisoner; since there was great indignation felt that a woman should appear in arms against Athens."[25] Artemisia was a threat to the foundation of Greek culture, that a soft spongy woman could stomach the atrocities of war.[26] Cleopatra was personally targeted in a vicious smear campaign by Octavian, who portrayed her relationship with Antony as that of a witch using sorcery to compel her hapless victim. It is widely believed that Cleopatra held the power in the relationship between herself and Antony. Appian states that, "So straight away the attention that Antonius had until now devoted to every matter was completely blunted, and whatever Cleopatra commanded was done, without consideration of what was right in the eyes of man or god."[27] Antony was enthralled by her, while Cleopatra never lost sight of how precarious their position of power was. She insisted on being present with her own troops at the battle of Actium, either fearing her soldiers would refuse to obey the orders of a Roman officer or that without her guidance Antony would be persuaded to change his position.

[25] Herodotus, *The Histories,* Bk 8.88, Translated by A.D. Godley.
[26] Hippocrates, *Diseases of Women*, Bk 1.1, Translated by A.E. Hanson.
[27] Appian, *The Civil Wars*, Bk 5.9, Translated by H. White.

Contemporary portrayals

The primary source for the life of Artemisia was written a generation after her campaign with the Persian army, by a man who was a toddler during the campaign itself. Artemisia is also blessed in that Herodotus was from her city, Halicarnassus, and portrays her in a favorable light. Whether this is because of her actual military prowess or simply because of their shared origins is unknowable. When Herodotus visited the ruler of Halicarnassus, he spoke to Artemisia's own son, Pisindelis, who gave him a great many details on Artemisia's part in the Persian invasion of Greece. It was from Pisindelis that Herodotus first learned of Artemisia's treacherous attack of an allied vessel during the Battle of Salamis. Yet Herodotus portrays this decision not as a vicious and unprovoked blow to an ally, but rather as a calculated maneuver to free herself from a pursuing Athenian warship. He praises her strategic prowess, noting that she alone can foresee the outcome of Salamis by correctly assessing the strength of the allied Greek warships as superior to the invading Persian fleet. Herodotus Another source writing a generation after the Persian war mentions Artemisia briefly, and in a far less favorable light. Thessalus, son of Hippocrates, calls her a scheming pirate and tells of her conquering the island of Cos under the orders of the Persian king. He states that after leading an expedition to take the island by force the gods intervened leaving Artemisia shipwrecked, though she was still able to conquer the island.[28]

Cleopatra was not as lucky as Artemisia was in having a contemporary author who favored her, as most of the sources for her life were Roman authors.[29] Her actions during the Roman Civil war were portrayed as that of a twisted evil temptress and destroyer of men. Although,

[28] Müller, K.O. 1839. *The History and Antiquities of the Dorian Race,* pg. 460.
[29] Pomeroy, S. 1995. *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves.* pg. 229.

simultaneously Antony was blamed for his own weakness and for allowing himself to be so easily manipulated by the foreign queen. Historian Sarah Palmeroy sums up Cleopatra's reputation in Rome quite nicely, "Antony was considered to have been mistaken in opposing Octavian, but he was still a Roman. The real villain was Cleopatra, who had led the virtuous Roman astray."[30] Cleopatra was constantly compared to Octavia, who behaved as a Roman matron should, seeking diplomacy even in the face of the insulting affair between her husband and Cleopatra. Plutarch, who wrote a century after the death of Cleopatra, attempts to give his readers a fair portrayal of her, highlighting not only her charms and beauty but also her intellect and wit.[31] It is Plutarch who tells us that she was the first of her dynasty to learn Egyptian, and rarely needed a translator. The Greek historian Cassius Dio tells us of her appeal to her adversaries, "For she was a woman of surpassing beauty, and at that time, when she was in the prime of her youth, she was most striking; she also possessed a most charming voice and knowledge of how to make herself agreeable to everyone. Being brilliant to look upon and to listen to, with the power to subjugate everyone, even a love-sated man already past his prime."[32] But Dio wrote two hundred years after Cleopatra, so his opinion of her beauty and charm must be taken with a grain of salt.

Later portrayals

As time passed, historians writing on Artemisia began to accredit to her the works of her descendants, specifically that of Artemisia II of Caria. Macedonian historian Polyaenus, who wrote during the second century AD, gives Artemisia I credit for the taking of a city that

[30] Pomeroy, S. 1990. *Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra,* pg. 26.
[31] Plutarch, *The Life of Antony*, Translated by J. Dryden.
[32] Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Translated by E. Cary and H. Foster.

historian's believe was actually perpetrated by Artemisia II nearly a century later. He writes, "Artemisia planted soldiers in ambush near Latmus; and herself, with a numerous train of women, eunuchs and musicians, celebrated a sacrifice at the grove of the Mother of the Gods, which was about seven stades distant from the city. When the inhabitants of Latmus came out to see the magnificent procession, the soldiers entered the city and took possession of it. Thus did Artemisia, by flutes and cymbals, possess herself of what she had in vain endeavored to obtain by force of arms."[33] This story was attributed to Artemisia partly because the numbering of rulers with the same name is a modern invention designed to help distinguish between them, and partly because a devious Artemisia who tricked her way into the city fit the narrative already established by Thessalus. Even Herodotus, who praised Artemisia for her strategic mind, had inadvertently prepared the next generations to embrace the image of the deceptive foreign queen. The latest story attributed to Artemisia is told almost 13 centuries after her death by a Byzantine Christian named Photios. It is from Photios that we learn how Artemisia possibly died. "Artemisia, daughter of Lygdamis, who made war with Persia; enamoured of Dardarnus of Abydos and scorned, she scratched out his eyes while he slept but as her love increased under the inflence of divine anger, she came to Leucade at the instruction of an oracle, threw herself from the top of the rock, killed herself and was buried."[34] Artemisia has been transformed from a cool-headed naval commander to that of a woman corrupted by her emotions.

Cleopatra's reputation continued to evolve as time progressed, transforming from that of a Ptolemaic queen and independent ruler to that of a tempting seductress who relied on her

[33] Polyaenus, *Stratagems*, Translated by R. Shepherd, Bk 8.53
[34] Photios, *Epitome of the Ecclesiastical History of Philostorgius, complied by Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople*. Translated by E. Walford, C.190.

feminine charms to wield power. Josephus, a Jewish historian who wrote a century after Cleopatra's death, gives her a scathing review. "She was also by nature very covetous, and stuck at no wickedness. She had already poisoned her brother, because she knew that he was to be king of Egypt, and this when he was but fifteen years old; and she got her sister Arsinoe to be slain, by the means of Antony, when she was a supplicant at Diana's temple at Ephesus; for if there were but any hopes of getting money, she would violate both temples and sepulchers. Nor was there any holy place that was esteemed the most inviolable, from which she would not fetch the ornaments it had in it; nor any place so profane, but was to suffer the most flagitious treatment possible from her, if it could but contribute somewhat to the covetous humor of this wicked creature: yet did not all this suffice so extravagant a woman, who was a slave to her lusts, but she still imagined that she wanted everything she could think of, and did her utmost to gain it; for which reason she hurried Antony on perpetually to deprive others of their dominions, and give them to her."[35] She is portrayed with words and images not of an independent monarch seeking to maintain her throne, but with dark, sensual, even erotic language in order to highlight where her true power comes from.[36] These accounts stem from the propaganda orchestrated by Octavian to sway the Roman populace into supporting his campaign against Antony and Cleopatra.[37] Octavian's propaganda has permanently influenced the historical account of Cleopatra, leaving historians with the task of separating bias from truth, seductress from leadership, with the real Cleopatra lost in time. This dichotomy of Cleopatra has attracted attention throughout history, and has enabled her to be rendered in thousands of works of art and literature.

[35] Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews.* Translated by , Ch. 15.1.
[36] Pomeroy, S. 1990. *Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra,* pg. 27.
[37] Pomeroy, S. 1995. *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves,* pg. 187.

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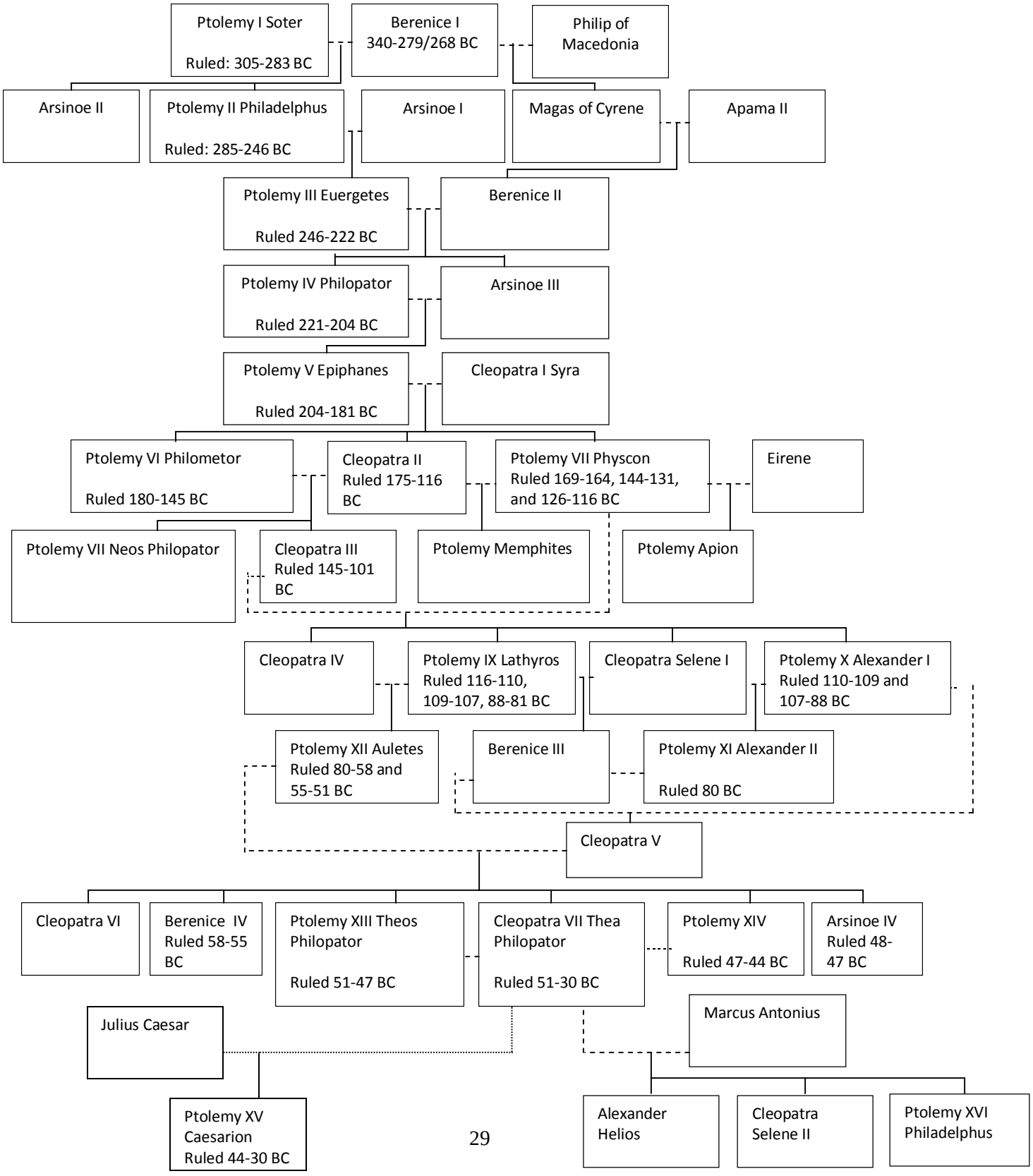
APPENDIX A

Ptolemaic Dynasty Family Tree



APPENDIX B

Map of the Ancient Mediterranean Sea